



HOW TO...

Create a floor shadow



You can give real definition and depth to objects in images with some well-placed shading. Adam Banks explains how to add a floor shadow to a part of your image to make it instantly more realistic and dynamic

Shadows help to make cut-out objects seem more real. The simplest type is a drop shadow: a copy of the object's shape, placed behind, filled with grey, given a soft (blurred) edge and offset by a short distance. This gives the impression that the object is lying on or floating above a parallel flat surface.

It's trickier to cast the shadow of an object standing upright; this is known as a floor shadow. The following steps show how to do it in Paint Shop Pro 9 (PSP9), but this method will work in other versions. The final step, selective blurring, is easy with PSP's customisable Radial Blur. A more advanced method is to create a copy of the shadow, and heavily blur it using Gaussian Blur. The images used here are on this month's cover disc.

1 To begin, you need an object cut out in a separate layer. The Layers palette, which you can bring up by pressing F8 or selecting it under View, Palettes, should show a plain Background layer with a Raster layer above it containing your object.

You could use the same image used here, which is on this month's cover disc, or alternatively create your own. Creating cut-outs is beyond the scope of this article, but as an example you could isolate an object within a photo by drawing around it with the FreeHand Selection (lasso) tool. Set a 1-pixel Feather in the Options toolbar at the top before you start, to soften the edge. Copy the object by selecting Copy from the Edit menu, then paste it as a new layer by selecting that option

from Paste in the Edit menu. In the Layers palette click on the Background layer, which contains the original photo. In the Materials palette on the right, set the Background and Fill Colour to white, then press Delete to fill the Background layer.

Move your object to the left of the canvas and make sure there's plenty of room to the right for the shadow. If necessary, go to the Image menu, select Canvas Size, and increase the Width. Click the left arrow under Placement.

2 In the Layers palette, click the top layer name with the right mouse button and choose Duplicate from the menu. This makes a copy of the object's layer. Click on the layer name below to make the original layer active again. Pick the Deform tool from the main toolbox or press D. Click the top centre handle of the dotted box-shaped outline (known as the bounding box) shown around the object – remember you're seeing the top layer, but editing the layer below – and drag down to about half the height.

3 Hold down the Shift key and move the cursor over the top centre handle again. The cursor shows a skewed rectangle to indicate Skew mode. Drag to the right to skew the object across. Hold down the Ctrl key as well as Shift to activate Free mode. Drag the bottom-left handle upwards and to the right so the bottom of the distorted bottle gets fatter. This will move the copy away from the original bottle, so click within the bounding box and drag it back into place.

Finally, holding down Shift and Ctrl again, drag the top-left handle to the right to narrow the bottle towards the end.

4 From the Adjust menu, select Brightness and Contrast, then Threshold. Enter a value of 255 in the dialog box. This makes the object solid black. Click OK to get a hard shadow.

5 Select Blur then Radial Blur from the Filter menu. In the dialog box that appears, drag the cross on the left-hand preview pane to place the centre of the blur at the bottom left of the shadow, where it will sit under the bottle. Set the Blur Type to Zoom and Strength to about 85%; adjust this by eye on your own picture. Set Protect Centre to 100% to keep the shadow sharp at the centre while blurring it as it progresses outwards. You may find it helps to turn off the previews, using the first of the four icons at the top right, while you change the settings.

Click OK to apply this, then go back to Radial Blur. Change the type to Spin and Strength to 10%. This adds some sideways blur, rotating around the same centre.

6 In the Layers palette, change the shadow layer's blending mode from Normal to Multiply. You'll be able to replace the white background with an image, perhaps a texture, and the shadow will darken it realistically. You can also lighten the shadow by reducing the layer's opacity using the percentage slider.

